

## On Location



Clockwise from left: Anne Faulborn, Cosmos, David Toop & Keiji Haino

### NIGHT OF THE UNEXPECTED AMSTERDAM PARADISO

THE NETHERLANDS

BY MATT FFYTICHE

It might have been the mysterious hints about The Night Of The Unexpected thrown out by Roland Spekle, curator of this one-night festival of new music for Amsterdam's Gaudeamus Music Week, or it may have been the fug emanating from the coffee shops, but as I entered the vestibule of the Paradiso — Amsterdam's cultish alt rock venue — I wasn't entirely surprised to find harpsichordist Anne Faulborn suspended a few metres above the ground encased in an exuberant steel and gauze structure. Her splicing of rogue bars from Bach, Berg and boogie woogie presented an appetiser of sorts for the kind of kaleidoscopic irreverence that might lie ahead.

But when the belly of the venue swung open and the small crowd spilled into the acoustically sculpted darkness of the reconditioned church interior, I was totally unprepared for the compulsive charge of Louis Andriessen's *Hoketus*, which was already ricocheting between the far aisles. Two ensembles of six players, exact replicas of each other, faced off across the nave, each emitting the same pair of notes a split second apart, alternating as a sudden strike and counter-strike. Not so much an echo as a violent

game of snap played with saxophones, congas, panpipes, electric piano and what appeared to be a five string bass guitar. Hand signals initiated fractional rhythm shifts between the ensembles, altering the phase pattern of the basic motifs. Now it was a cuckoo clock, now a demonic factory rhythm, an aggressively dislocated counterpoint sounding like Bertolt Brecht directing Steve Reich. This, for me, was the real starting point for the unexpected — not a melange of alien musics, but the forceful ground on which disparate techniques and genres intersected and collided with each other throughout the evening. In fact, the meshing together of Stravinsky and ragtime latent in Andriessen's work proved weirdly prescient. The same impulsive staccato cropped up in the manic honky tonk of Conlan Nancarrow's player piano pieces which punctuated events in the main hall, as well as finding a distant echo in Thomas Brinkmann's manipulation of clickety-click vinyl into whirling helicopter loops.

Spekle had taken pains to devise as dynamic a platform as possible for the sounds on display. No contribution was to last for more than 20 minutes, and performances ran concurrently in separate halls, effectively sending you ping-ponging through the venue and chopping the experiences into even smaller units. A further condition was that no one in the main hall was

allowed simply to stand on stage. No sooner had *Hoketus* fired its last pistol shots than David Toop was intoning a manifesto for deep listening from somewhere in the upper balcony, and then the spotlight fell on the ribcage of an upright pianola, thrumming its auto-generated way through Nancarrow's dense *Study For Player Piano No 3*. After this, a laser and sound performance from Edwin Van Der Heide. Green beams snapped open into 2D planes that jumped at split-second intervals in time to Ryoji Ikeda-style surgical jabs at sub-bass levels. From zen ocean to military sublime in only ten minutes. Later with the performance of a second Andriessen piece, *Workers Union*, the venue became a temporary concert hall, but with players positioned in two wide arcs below a giant video screen on which Eboman was grabbing and sampling found images from Al-Jazeera. A grainy stream of dislocated consciousness was warped into abstract kinetic smears, while the mainly brass ensemble swapped punchy martial riffs against the urgent percussion work of Tatiano Koleva. Later still, DAT Politics would reclaim the arena as a playspace for their quirky laptop pop.

Meanwhile the more intimate small hall, with its David Lynchian red drapes, was dominated by friends from Japan. The diminutive Keiji Haino, in black leather, insectoid Ray-Bans and long,

luxuriant baby doll hair, was unleashing a high decibel lava flow by waving his hands over a light sensitive noise generator. Apparently there had been an ultimatum given about the need for total artistic license in the volume levels. At 114 decibels, it was enough to give me full-body tremors — the perfect counterpart to Haino's mimed death throes and orgiastic vocals as the banshee was fed through the meat mincer. The later collaboration between Haino and David Toop — two artists who had little knowledge of each other's music until the day before the show — generated less heat, with Haino fingering a prepared guitar, by turns angular, fragile and plangent, while Toop manipulated small objects on a tambourine and played a bone through a pint glass of water. Well, "they said anything could happen", as the old Smirnoff tagline went. The ethereal hub of the night for me, though, the inverted counterpart to Andriessen and Haino's dynamic displays, had to be the rare performance by Cosmos — the duo of Ami Yoshida's rasping, reed-like vocalisations and Sachiko M's faint sheath of tone generated from a no-input sampler. Zombie-like, deathly pale, and grasping her throat with her mouth drawn into a tragic rictus, Yoshida emits the most extraordinary thin trills. Or a faint screech like a scraped string, sometimes pared down to an abstract whimper. □